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VANDALISM

Government
Publications

5 BRAMPTON YOUNGSTERS DEPOSITORY LIBRARY MATERIAL
RAM NEW CARS IN PLANT

VOCATIONAL CENTRE
INVADED BY YOUTHS

Vandalism in the Parks

Stalled car at roadside
ransacked, left burning

Sign Throw on
Tracks Delays
Commuter Train



On peut également se procurer cette brochure en français.

This booklet is one of a series dealing with different types of crimes and their impact upon the victims, the offender and the public at large. While the booklets may be of general interest, they are designed primarily as a resource to be used by parents, teachers, youth workers, police and others who work with young people.



Provincial
Secretariat
for Justice

Additional copies of the booklet can be obtained from the Ontario Government Book Store, 880 Bay Street, Toronto, Ontario M7A 1N8.

The Honourable Gord Walker, Q.C.,
Provincial Secretary for Justice

The story and characters described in 'The Incident' portion of this booklet are fictitious. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

THE INCIDENT

It had seemed like a good idea at the time, Bob recalled. Clever, even.

"You're always so clever, Bob," Mary-Lou had said. "Why couldn't I have thought of that?"

She's darn glad she didn't now, he smiled bitterly; otherwise she'd be the one hauled up in court...

The gang had decided to have a corn roast out at the end of Thompson's point. Perfectly good holiday fun. It isn't really private property along the shoreline anyway, someone had assured them. He'd heard that for years around the lake; so when they were younger they used to play games in and out of the water wherever they felt like going.

The lake was a friendly place, after all; most of the families had been coming there for years.

As a matter of fact the only unfriendly place was Thompson's big, old white frame summer home out on the point. Nobody ever seemed to be there, and yet they kept the property up — fresh paint every spring, screens repaired, driveway well gravelled. Even the "PRIVATE PROPERTY — TRESPASSEES WILL BE PROSECUTED" sign was touched up every year. Yet Bob Johnson and the other kids had never seen a car in the drive, a boat at the dock, or a light in the house. Eventually the legend grew that someone had



died there — a son or a daughter drowned maybe — and the place was kept up by the parents as a kind of memorial. It was Bass Lake's haunted house.

It had all begun innocently enough with the corn roast on Sunday night before Civic Holiday. And it might have remained that way if a couple of Mary-Lou's older brother's pals hadn't arrived from the city for the weekend. Or if they hadn't brought a supply of booze with them.

Everything was fine around the campfire until the strangers started asking questions about the Thompson place, standing there all shuttered and mysterious in the moonlight.

"You mean it's been standing there, deserted like that, for years and years?"

"How come you've never gone in?" one of the visitors asked Bob. "You chicken?"

"It's private property; and anyway they keep it locked up tighter than a bank vault."

The boys got up and went on an inspection tour. They tried the doors and poked at the shutters and stood back to look up speculatively at the high screened verandah and the windows on the second floor above the verandah roof.

"There's no way, short of burglary."

Bob had a better idea: "If they don't want visitors why don't we help them? Let's really block the place up."

Whereupon he rolled a big boulder across the path. Someone else followed suit until they had quite a pile. The back steps were next — they pulled away from the door easily, and they turned them upside down on the rock pile. Someone else started breaking branches off nearby trees to extend their improvised fence. Pretty soon everybody was into the act.

After some strenuous effort — including hoisting the Thompson dock out of the water and leaving it high and dry behind the boathouse, they stood back to admire their handiwork.

"Do you think they'll get the message?"

Someone got a charred stick from their bonfire down at the beach and scrawled "Welcome" across the clean, white door. Not satisfied, another of the boys took a sharp stone and scratched the sarcastic message into the paint. He punctuated it by throwing the stone through a window on the adjoining wall.

"It just needs one more thing," Bob said, looking around for inspiration. "I know what."

He ran down the lane toward the road and started pulling at the "NO TRESPASSING" sign nailed up on the gatepost. At that very moment a car came up the point road and Bob stood there paralyzed while the headlights flickered through the trees, around the circle at the end of the point, and caught him in their full glare.

"It's the OPP!"

Bob heard the shout and a mad scramble; then he found himself left all alone to face the music.

* * *



What Is Vandalism?

Vandalism — the wilful damaging or defacing of property belonging to another person or to the public — is covered under Sections 387 and 388 of the Criminal Code of Canada dealing with "mischief", and "wilful damage". Committing an act of vandalism is a criminal offence.

Section 387 (1) states: "Everyone commits mischief who wilfully (a) destroys or damages property, (b) renders property dangerous, useless, inoperative or ineffective, (c) obstructs, interrupts or interferes with the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property, or (d) obstructs, interrupts or interferes with any person in the lawful use, enjoyment or operation of property."

Those who commit mischief in relation to private property may be found guilty of an indictable offence and are liable to imprisonment for five years, or of an offence punishable on summary conviction; and those committing mischief in relation to public property may be found guilty of an indictable offence and are liable to imprisonment for 14 years, or of an offence punishable on summary conviction. Everyone who commits mischief that causes actual danger to life may be found guilty of an indictable offence and is liable to imprisonment for life.

If the conditions surrounding the offences dealing with public and private property are of a sufficiently serious nature, the prosecution may elect to proceed by way of indictment rather than by summary conviction.

Furthermore, a court that convicts an accused of an indictable offence may, upon application of an aggrieved person, at the time sentence is imposed, order that the accused pay an amount to satisfy or compensate for the loss or

damage to property suffered by the applicant as a result of the commission of the offence.

Vandalism is a serious matter!

Where and When?

Vandalism may be perpetrated wherever the opportunity exists — often in schools after hours, on transit systems late at night, in public parks after dark, and on premises which are not occupied. Usually vandals do their mischief when they think nobody will see them — at least nobody who is likely to try to stop them.

Who Are The Vandals?

Most acts of vandalism involve male juveniles or young adults; but since fewer than 10 per cent of all vandals are apprehended, it has not been possible to derive a well-defined pattern of distinctive characteristics.

Why?

Vandalism has been seen, in some cases, as an act of defiance against a society that the individual neither understands nor approves (and which he may feel already disapproves of him); but in other instances it is simply the result of hi-jinx and playfulness that get out of hand.

Many Forms Of Vandalism

One way of classifying the wide spectrum of vandalism has been suggested by a City of Mississauga task force on the subject —

Ritualized vandalism — Hallowe'en, New Year's Eve.

Vandalism associated with various events — Grey Cup game, college pranks, etc.

Vandalism associated with play —
breaking windows in buildings
abandoned or under construction.

Vandalism regarded as routine wear and tear — gum under seats, graffiti, cigarette burns, etc.

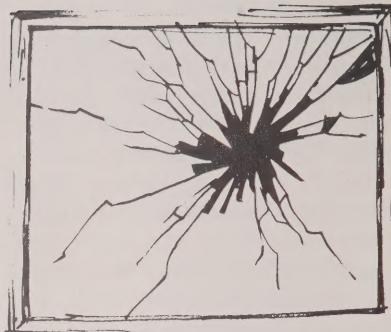
Vandalism directed toward specific institutions — industrial sabotage during strikes, some forms of school property destruction.

"Licenced" vandalism — hotels requiring deposits to cover anticipated costs of damage from visiting conventions.

Who, Me?

Considering the broad spectrum of acts that can be labelled vandalism, it would be an unusual person who could honestly say that he or she had never indulged — or at least been tempted to indulge — in some such behaviour.

And it is doubtful if anyone has escaped contact with the results of vandalism — a summer cottage broken into and the interior left a shambles, tree limbs broken off, a car deliberately scratched, obscenities painted on walls, and so on. At one end of the scale (usually where damage is not seen as too costly) society seems to tolerate some acts of vandalism;

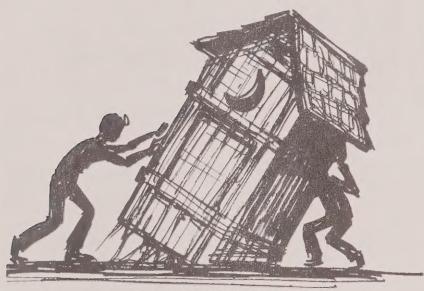


but as the costs increase and the perpetrators of the damage are seen as deviant individuals and as threats to our security, we become less tolerant and seek ways to prevent vandalism.

People who own property that is damaged or destroyed by vandals usually see red — red rage and red ink. The costs of this wanton destruction are high — variously estimated at close to \$100 million a year in Canada at present. It has been estimated that the current cost of public and private school vandalism in Toronto is approximately \$2.2 million a year.

Favorite Targets

Schools are a frequent target for vandals — particularly school windows, which are so commonly broken that the Canadian Education Association has taken the trouble to estimate the cost per pupil of school window breakage in various cities across the country. For the year 1975 the CEA reported this figure as ranging from a high of \$3.40 per pupil in Vancouver to less than \$1 per pupil in the Leeds and Grenville region of Ontario. School damage in addition to broken windows ranged from \$5.18 per pupil in Toronto to less than \$1 in Calgary Roman



Catholic schools and in Leeds and Grenville. Annual vandalism costs averaged across all U.S. schools at approximately \$10 per pupil.

Transit systems in major cities also come in for a substantial share of attention from vandals — slashed seats, broken windows, defaced signs, etc. — as do public parks, especially in those sections of cities where school and transit system vandalism is also high.

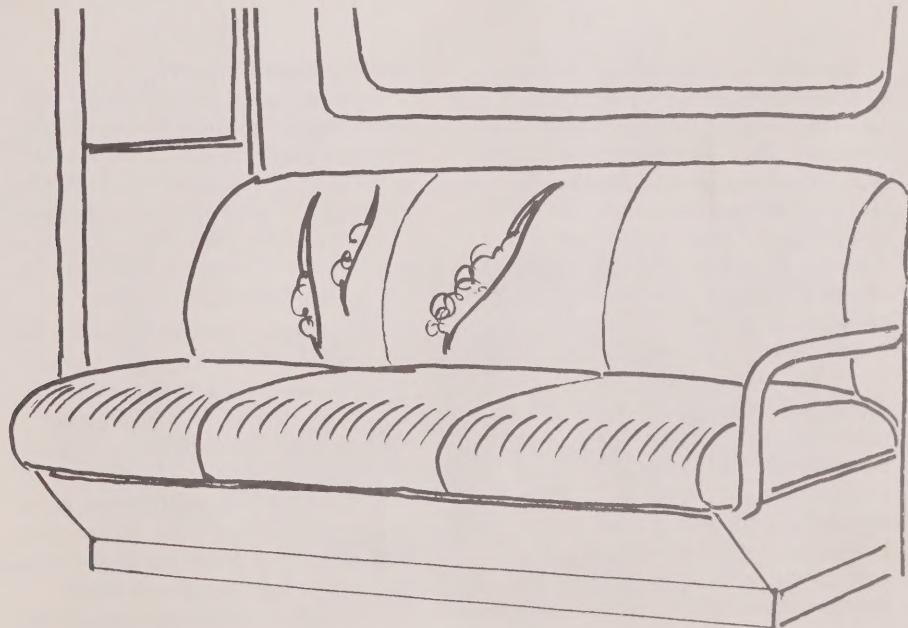
Private property also receives considerable attention from vandals, especially vacant properties; and construction sites with their accessible materials and equipment are an almost irresistible temptation to venturesome youngsters.

Several studies in Canada, the U.S., and England indicate an increase in reported incidents of malicious damage during the spring and fall, with the lowest period of reported vandalism

occurring during mid-summer. Day of the week and time of day patterns of prevalence vary with accessibility of targets and with the opportunity for attacking them.

Not Always Young

While young people, often in groups, are most frequently found to be involved in acts of vandalism, property damaging behaviour is by no means confined to one age group. For example, authorities at first believed that damage to trees in a Toronto cemetery was the work of teenagers but eventually discovered that it had been done by an adult employee. Young adults in gangs and members of hate-motivated groups often act out their fears and phobias at the expense of society. And many lives have been lost and hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of property damage has been caused by riots and fires in penal institutions.





Sometimes carelessness on the part of adults combines with the daredevil spirit of young hell raisers to produce vandalism. This is what happened when security precautions at a Brampton, Ontario, car plant were neglected and five children found it easy to get into the area where new cars were parked awaiting shipment. In short order they caused more than \$12,000 damage to the vehicles.

This last example illustrates the simple fact that most vandalism occurs where there is a relatively easy opportunity to do damage without being caught in the act. Which, of course, suggests one obvious strategy for prevention — maintain good security, keep property well lighted and under regular surveillance.

Feelings About Property

Brighter lights, stronger locks, and higher fences, however helpful in preventing a particular act of vandalism — or deflecting it to another locale where there is easier access and less likelihood of being caught — fail to get at the root of the problem, which may involve the way people feel about property.

One school of thought runs like this: when a child is very young he or she does not recognize private property rights. The whole neighbourhood is a playground, the neighbours' flowers are there to be picked or uprooted, their apples or cherries are there to be eaten, their garages, trees, shrubs, and garbage pails are made for games of hide and seek. It comes as a rude shock when the child is told in no uncertain

terms to stay off other people's property.

The majority of children soon learn to distinguish their family's and their own property from that which belongs to other people. They readily see the desirability of treating other people's property the way they would like others to treat theirs. The majority of people learn this lesson well and early, otherwise there would be a great deal more vandalism threatening us from all sides.

This line of reasoning concludes that society — and individual parents — must seek to reinforce this learning process. It is not enough merely to correct the minority who fail to learn respect for other people's property and responsibility for their own. Positive, preventive steps have to be taken.

When concerned people search for causes in an effort to develop a basis for preventive action, it is quite natural for them to focus on the **problem** and the minority who contribute to it. They may learn what causes destructive, anti-social behaviour in this minority; but they may not develop sufficient understanding of the influences which prevent this kind of behaviour among the much larger, non-vandal population. Obviously a great many parents, teachers, and others who influence young people must be doing something right, otherwise the statistics on juvenile delinquency, vandalism, and other manifestations of mixed-up values would be much higher than they are today.



More In City's Core

Mapping reported incidents of vandalism in such cities as Toronto, Hamilton, and London, Ontario, shows a pattern very similar to that found in U.S. studies — a higher prevalence in older, more central sections of the city where lower socio-economic conditions prevail. Of course, vandalism can occur anywhere, but youths from such city core areas tend to come to the attention of the police and the courts more often than others.

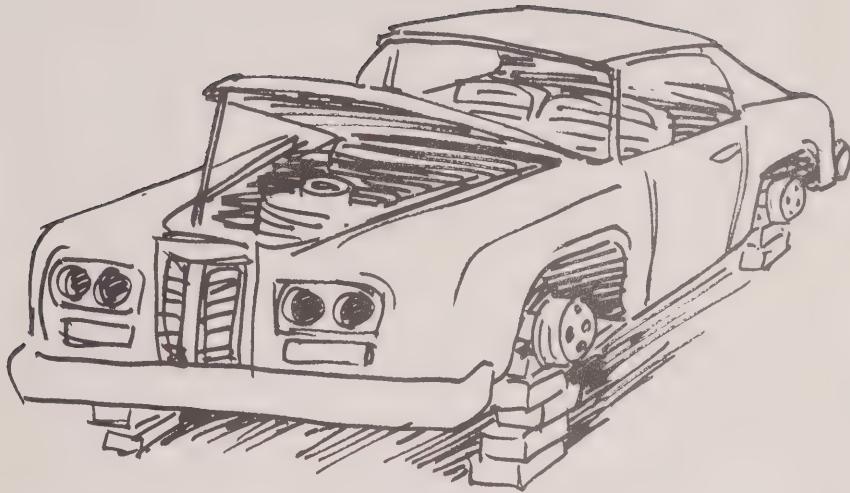
Such factors as family instability, poor housing, neighbourhood gang traditions, lack of recreational programs, and most particularly lack of community spirit are seen as factors in this central city vandalism rate.

Personal Concern Needed

The concept of "defensible space", which is being put forward by concerned architects and town planners, involves the designing of areas in structures and groups of structures which will attract the **personal concern** of individuals living and working in the district and will thereby foster a greater degree of informal social control over the behaviour of those who frequent the area.

In other words, it is creating buildings and spaces around buildings which are enjoyable and which will invite people to care about them instead of turning a deaf ear and a blind eye to evidences of malicious damage. This kind of personal caring cannot be legislated; but it can be encouraged.





Perhaps the ultimate demonstration of failure to care about other people's property is found in a field study in which a sociologist abandoned an automobile on the street in a middle class New York City residential neighbourhood to see what would happen. Within 26 hours the car was stripped, with the major theft and damage being done during the day in full view of

passers-by, and by reasonably well-dressed respectable looking citizens. When the same experiment was repeated in Palo Alto, California, the car was left untouched for three days. Attitudes toward other people's property vary widely from one community to another; and investigation of the basis of these attitudes may yield a significant key to vandalism prevention.

WHAT CAN BE DONE?



Suggested Preventive Measures

A number of conferences and task force studies of vandalism have come up with a wide variety of proposals for reducing the offences in various locations. Clearly not all of these proposals have equal merit and some may not have the effect desired, but the main points recommended for consideration include:

- (1) Improved lighting and greater use of alarm devices after hours at schools.
- (2) Rapid and uniform reporting of incidents of vandalism and immediate repair of damage.
- (3) More use of schools for evening and weekend community programs.

- (4) Designing "defensible space" into buildings and landscaping to encourage more use and greater personal concern and informal surveillance for public property.
- (5) Greater public understanding of and cooperation with police.
- (6) Provision of guidelines for the courts in imposing community service orders for vandalism offenders (opportunities to serve the community constructively instead of fines or jail sentences).
- (7) Opportunities for social discontent to be expressed and communicated to appropriate authorities without resort to violence and damage.

(8) More positive control over the use of alcohol and other drugs which tend to diminish an individual's control over his own behaviour.

No Panacea

Vandalism has been troubling and perplexing people down through the ages — since long before the 5th century A.D. when a wandering northern European tribe, the Vandals, invaded Rome and despoiled its art treasures, and gave the wanton destruction of property its name. It is by no means the greatest problem of our age, but it is an ongoing source of expense and worry to taxpayers and owners of private property and business establishments. There are a great many varieties of vandalism, attributable to a wide range of motivations, so there can be no simple, single solution. There is no panacea.

It has been noted that most acts of vandalism involve male juveniles or

young adults, so the values and attitudes in this part of the population deserve special attention, as do the models of adult male behaviour which appeal to these young people. To change attitudes is a slow process that can only be accomplished by patient and repeated demonstration of positive, socially constructive models — reinforced continually by acceptable rewards.

Awareness is also a key factor — awareness on the part of everyone that vandalism can take place where the circumstances invite it and make it easy. Every citizen has a part to play in its prevention.

It may seem hackneyed to speak of the desirability of achieving greater maturity and social responsibility on the part of all citizens, but this is nonetheless true. And changes in this direction will, of course, not only affect the prevalence of vandalism but will also improve the quality of life for everybody.



SOME QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

(1) If you came upon a group of youngsters throwing stones at the windows of a new house under construction what would you do?

(2) Why do you think boys are more often involved in acts of vandalism than are girls?

(3) What is the best way of teaching people to respect public and private property?

(4) What methods do you think would be most effective in protecting a school against broken windows and other types of vandalism?

(5) What would be some effective ways for a community to protect its parks against vandalism?

(6) What would you do if you saw a group of children dropping stones and bottles from an overpass bridge onto the roadway beneath it?

(7) Do you think that reports in the newspaper or stories on television are likely to have any influence on the occurrence of vandalism?

(8) Why does vandalism tend to occur more in some parts of a city than in others?

(9) Do you think most kids get a kick out of doing some damage at some time? Why might some kids want to do more damage than others, and more often?

(10) Would a feeling of being known and accepted in the community tend to make young people think twice before committing an act of vandalism?

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